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## Viewing cable 09BUENOSAIRES561, Argentina: Candidates Announced; Former President

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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**#09BUENOSAIRES561.**

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09BUENOSAIRES561</a>	<a href="#">2009-05-12 14:02</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Buenos Aires</a>

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SUBJECT: Argentina: Candidates Announced; Former President  
Kirchner to Run in June 28 Congressional Mid-terms

Ref: (A) Buenos Aires 360  
(B) Buenos Aires 515 and previous  
(C) Buenos Aires 347

Classified by Ambassador Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and introduction: Former president Nestor Kirchner (NK) and his former vice president Daniel Scioli will head the ruling coalition's (FpV) ticket for congressional seats representing the electoral plum of Buenos Aires province, where the Kirchners have set their hopes on winning enough seats to retain a working majority in Congress. The FpV also announced that Cabinet Chief Sergio Massa will take the fourth place on the FpV slate behind actress Nacha Guevara, famous for her portrayal of the iconic Evita Peron. The dissident Peronist slate will be headed by congressional deputies Francisco de Narvaez and Felipe Sola, and the UCR-Civic Coalition slate by Margarita Stolbizer and Ricardo Alfonsin. In the next four biggest voting districts, the Kirchners are expected to lose, which makes the race in Buenos Aires province (with 37% of the national vote) the race to watch. Now that parties and coalitions have finished their internal wrangling over nominations and positions on party slates for the June 28 congressional mid-term elections, Argentine campaigns are expected to swing into high gear and may even draw some the attention of an otherwise pretty indifferent public. End summary and introduction.

¶2. (SBU) Argentine political parties met the May 9 deadline for registering their lists of candidates for the June 28 national congressional mid-term elections (some provinces and cities will also be holding legislative and city council elections, and some of these will coincide with the June 28 date). Since mid-March when the Congress approved President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) bill to move up the legislative elections from October to June 28 (ref A), political leaders have been scurrying to define alliances and determine composition and order of candidate slates. The province of Buenos Aires (with 37% of the national vote) is the electoral plum, and is the main hope of the Kirchners for retaining their slim working majority in the Congress -- particularly since they are widely expected to lose in the next four biggest districts: the federal capital, and the provinces of Cordoba, Santa Fe, and Mendoza.

¶3. (SBU) The opposition, whose key candidates had been largely known by April, was quicker than the ruling Victory Front (FpV) in publishing its candidate slates. May 9 local newspapers detailed the opposition parties' slates in the top electoral district of Buenos Aires province while the FpV waited until shortly before midnight on May 9 to announce its slate. Media devoted unprecedented coverage to the parties' announcement of their slates, airing two special shows the evening of May 9 as the parties were formally presenting their candidates to the Electoral Court. Although there are nominally over 40 national political parties and 650 local parties in Argentina, as has been the case in past elections, the principal candidates in the June mid-terms are backed by coalitions rather than individual parties. Parties registered their electoral alliances (which included seven alliances in Buenos Aires province and nine in the Federal District) on April 29 (ref B).

#### K Strategy in Buenos Aires Province: Circle the Wagons

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¶4. (C) In Buenos Aires province, former president Nestor Kirchner (NK) and his 2003-07 vice president Daniel Scioli will head the FpV ticket for seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The province will elect 35 deputies, of which the FpV has 20 seats at stake. Scioli is now the governor of Buenos Aires province and, although he has the second spot on the FpV slate, is considered more popular than Kirchner. If, as expected, he wins a congressional seat, he will likely step aside and let one of the FpV alternates take it so that he can continue as governor. The press and opposition have referred to candidacies like Scioli's as ""testimonial candidates."" (Note: In early April, NK first floated the idea that he and Scioli would head the ticket as national deputies, accompanied by the Kirchner-allied province's mayors as town council

candidates.) NK has not categorically stated that he will serve in the Chamber of Deputies if elected, although in a May 7 television interview he hinted that he would.

15. (C) The FpV also announced that the popular Cabinet Chief Sergio Massa will take the fourth place on the FpV slate behind actress Nacha Guevara, a political novice famous for her stage portrayal of the iconic Evita Peron. Massa is technically still the mayor of Tigre in suburban Buenos Aires, having taken a leave of absence from his mayoral duties in order to replace Alberto Fernandez as the foremost minister in the cabinet. Like Scioli, the young (37) and attractive Massa enjoys higher ratings than the Kirchners. His style is markedly more open, inclusive, and flexible than Nestor Kirchner's, triggering rumors about irreconcilable differences between the two. Massa's inclusion on the slate may then temporarily quell the speculation about his "imminent departure" from the Cabinet Chief position, which has been a constant almost since the day he took the job at the end of July 2008. (There are, however, strong rumors that soon after the June 28 election there will be a cabinet shuffle, which might also be the opportunity for Massa to depart, as his staff tells us he would like to do.)

16. (C) Although initially the idea of having Kirchner head the FpV slate was that he would draw votes, some polls have indicated that he may be causing a net drain of votes for the FpV and that the ticket would be stronger without NK on it. To shore up support for the FpV tickets in the province, Kirchner reportedly insisted that 45 mayors and many other officials join the FpV slates for provincial and municipal legislative races to ensure their undivided commitment to the "oficialista" lists. It is perhaps an omen for the FpV's prospects that many highly popular mayors, ostensibly allied with the Kirchners, were openly reluctant to join the FpV slates. Paper-of-record "La Nacion" quoted one mayor from the Greater Buenos Aires questioning the need for the mayors to run as candidates, saying "people vote before they even read our names."

17. (C) With polls showing their support in the province hitting a ceiling of 35% or less, Kirchner and his allies are counting on the fractious opposition dividing the remainder of the vote in several smaller splinters. Currently, the most serious challenge is from the dissident Peronist slate headed by congressional deputies Francisco de Narvaez and Felipe Sola. The multi-millionaire De Narvaez and former governor Sola joined forces with Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri, leader of center-right PRO, who will campaign for the "Union-PRO" candidates. In the 2007 gubernatorial race in Buenos Aires province, De Narvaez drew 14.90% of the vote, which was considered an impressive showing since he did not have a presidential candidate at the top of his ticket.

18. (C) In third place is the UCR-Civic Coalition slate headed by Margarita Stolbizer and Ricardo Alfonsin. Stolbizer was the Civic Coalition's candidate for governor in 2007, when she drew 16.55% of the vote, and Alfonsin is the son of the recently deceased and warmly remembered president who led the 1983-89 return to democracy. Ironically, the Kirchners are reportedly counting on their nemesis, Vice President Cobos, to back up this ticket and, with his strong popularity, draw votes away from the dissident Peronists. Nationwide, in the strongest showing of opposition unity in the last decade, the UCR, the CC, and the Socialists have forged an alliance in 16 of the 24 voting districts that may provide a serious counterweight to the two major Peronist groupings. Embassy contacts in the UCR-Civic Coalition alliance say their top priority is to impress upon voters that they, not the dissident Peronists, are the true opposition alternative to the Kirchners and the FpV. In the province of Buenos Aires, there are also several smaller groupings which, together, could splinter off sufficient opposition votes to keep either the dissident Peronists or the UCR-Civic Coalition from beating the FpV.

Candidates in the Federal District

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¶9. (SBU) The Kirchers' victory chances are low in the country's second electoral district, the Federal District, where the race is Mayor Macri's Republican Proposal's (PRO) to lose. The Federal District has 9.5% of the total national vote (ref C) and will elect 13 deputies. While just a few weeks ago, it seemed the Peronist party (PJ) might present three separate candidate slates in the Federal District, NK was able to convince almost all of the city's PJ to support the candidacy of Carlos Heller to lead the slate. Heller is the current president of Credicoop Bank and was formerly active in the Communist party. Former Buenos Aires Mayor Jorge Telerman, whose candidacy was advocated by some PJ sectors, backed out of the race, explaining that the national government had "made it impossible to construct an autonomous Peronist political space." Heading the PRO ticket is the popular former Vice Mayor of Buenos Aires Gabriela Michetti, who recently resigned from the city government to run. Former Central Bank chief Alfonso Prat Gay will be heading the UCR-Civic Coalition alliance slate followed by constitutional expert Ricardo Gil Lavedra and Civic Coalition leader Elisa Carrio (the 2007 presidential runner-up) in the third slot.

#### Opposition Taking NK to Task

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¶10. (SBU) The opposition has wasted no time in responding to NK's decision to run in the June mid-terms along with other "testimonial candidates." Radical party leaders Gerardo Morales and Ricardo Gil Lavedra filed in federal court on May 11 a legal challenge to the candidacies of NK, Scioli, Massa, and some mayors, whom they believe will not occupy their newly elected positions. The alliance is also questioning the legality of NK's recent residency change from Santa Cruz province to Buenos Aires province, a requirement in order to run as a national deputy candidate in Buenos Aires province. (Comment: The legal challenges are not expected to flourish but, ironically, could give NK a convenient cover if he should decide to bow out of the race at the last minute to boost his ticket's chances.)

¶11. (SBU) At the same time, both PRO Union and the UCR-CC-Socialist alliance have challenged NK to a debate. De Narvaez noted that if NK does not debate it would "show his inability to be part of a democratic government." For her part, Stolbizer said, "we are going to demand the debate, but sadly we believe that Kirchner will not participate. His strategy has always been confrontation." She added that the debate needs to be with Kirchner and not just with De Narvaez. NK, who has successfully avoided debates prior and during his presidency, has not responded.

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) Argentina's legislatures are the product of a party list system in which congressional deputies are voted at large by their provinces and are therefore more beholden to party leaders than to voters. It is also a sad reflection on the weakness of political parties that these candidate lists were all decided behind closed doors by party leaders and factions. Argentine media have reported and speculated for months on potential candidacies, but interest in this process seemed to be the exclusive domain of the political class. Now that the internal wrangling over the party and coalition slates is over and the candidates have been announced, we may see, in the nearly seven weeks remaining before an election that will make or break the government, some signs of greater interest by the public at large.

WAYNE